
'Living not merely in the present': Time and the New Police in Britain.

The provident and careful man must necessarily be a thoughtful man, for he lives not merely in the present, but with provident forecast makes arrangement for the future. He must also be a temperate man, and exercise the virtue of self-denial - Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*. pp. 180-1.

Carolyn Steedman asked how the ordinary working-class men recruited to new police forces 'became policemen'. Despite the work by, among others, Haia Shpayer-Makov and Willem de Lint, this question ought still be posed. One crucial way that the reformed police of the nineteenth century differed from their predecessors was in their relationship with time. This paper, derived from watch committee minutes, police instruction books, police memoirs, and national government (HMI, MEPO and HO) records, attempts to explore this question.

The old policeman was an artisan trading on his own account: the new one was part of an institution which endured over time. Standardised and systematised procedures had the effect of de-skilling police work, reducing it instead to a series of straightforward operations which could be defined in terms of highly mechanistic duties. The new policeman was in many respects a proletarian. New police forces were paid regular wages, and in return for these the constable was expected to demonstrate close and continual attention to his duty.

This was defined through the regulations he was issued, and a study of these as a genre reveals a number of patterns in the way that he was controlled. Many of these are to do with time, and it is these aspects which this paper will explore. Most immediately, his time on duty was closely correlated with space: many forces issued detailed beat instructions which specified where each constable had to be at thirty-second intervals. This was usually enforced through random inspections (the prescribed duty of a sergeant, who was also following a closely-defined role, as were other supervisory officers), but sometimes was ensured through the passing of physical tokens. On rural beats the policeman was inspected through the medium of his occurrence books. The records were intended to create a mirror of events so that the policeman's movements could be reconstructed after the event during inspections – it is no wonder that later detectives used the word 'mirror' to refer to their notebooks.

The process of re-moulding the *habitus* of the policeman was a conscious one. It fitted into a wider strand of thought in nineteenth-century Britain about respectability and temperance: ideas which cut across class. It was aided by selective recruitment of policemen: men were recruited who had already demonstrated that they could take a long-term view of their lives and priorities. Once in the force, the idea of an incremental career was sustained through the use of different grades within ranks to produce career progression. At the end of the progression was the pension, a life-long gift designed to instil life-long loyalty. When the new police were instituted, however, the pension was discretionary, and was used as a perk which could be granted or withheld by the police authority: for this reason, agitation for a mandatory pension was an important aspect of developing police self-consciousness. Its success in 1890 marked an important landmark in the evolution of work-discipline.

Police were not alone in being working-class men with pension rights: soldiers, postal workers, and railway workers (all disciplined and uniformed occupations) were in the same situation in 1900. Nor did the view of the policeman stand in a vacuum: the ideal policeman had his corollary in the 'ideal' thief. In many explanatory frameworks, the criminal personality was portrayed as being driven by short-term goals: conversely the respectable workman was a man who could defer gratification.

This process of creating the career policeman was never a total one, of course: even in 1900 the new police were not an ideal-type bureaucracy for a number of reasons: one was the continuing exercise of paternalist authority, either directly or 'in commission' though a watch committee. Another was the continuing hold of market priorities on some aspects of police work, notably detective work. A third was the way that even the rule-bound institutions needed to allow some space for individual initiative, and made provision for this within their rules. All in all, however, they were a departure from their predecessors at least as abrupt and significant as Maurice of Nassau's bodily-disciplined musketeers.

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